

PLANNING BRIEFS

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HOW TO READ THE MASTER PLAN

After years of intensive discussions, studies, input and participation by hundreds of Amherst community members including citizens, Town staff and professional consultants, Amherst's Master Plan was officially adopted by the Planning Board on February 3, 2010. You can obtain a hard copy of the Master Plan from the Planning Department on the second floor of Town Hall, or you can view and print the Master Plan and related maps, surveys, and other supporting documents online at the Planning Department's website.

What's in the Master Plan? Essentially, a Master Plan is a broad assessment of the community's goals and ideals for the future, as well as an action plan for accomplishing these goals. It is a dynamic, active document which serves as a blueprint for further action. At over 100 pages, Amherst's Master Plan is a comprehensive report covering many different and complex aspects of Town life. The following information should help you understand the structure of the Master Plan (which follows state requirements).

Chapter 2 presents the **overall vision, goals, and priorities** that were developed by the community through the public process. It also describes in general the next steps the community should take.

Chapters 3-9 focus on **specific aspects of the community's character** and life-- Land Use, Demographics & Housing, Economic Development, Natural & Cultural Resources, Open Space & Recreation, Services and Facilities, and Transportation & Circulation. Each of these chapters begins with broad goals and overview, details existing conditions, and then presents more specific goals, objectives and strategies for accomplishing the community's vision for those elements of its life.

Chapter 10 gathers all of the **objectives and strategies** and provides specific directions for implementation which will be used by citizens' boards and Town staff. It is used in coordination with Appendix A, which is a checklist of the specific strategies proposed to for implementing the goals and objectives in the Master Plan.

How to read the Master Plan: As the Master Plan is a broad, evolving document, it does not include site or property-specific recommendations—rather, the strategies included are approaches for developing future policies and regulations, which will be refined by citizen boards and committees with assistance from Town staff.

When reading the Master Plan, it is helpful to keep in mind the basic components of policy, which are goals, objectives, and strategies. Goals are general statements of a desired outcome, whereas objectives indicate a specific direction for the goal (a goal may have more than one objective). Each objective is then broken down into discrete strategies,

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PLANNING DEPARTMENT ONLINE

New! View the "Land Development Brochure: A Citizen's Guide to Project Review and the Permit Process"

This 4-page PDF document, available on the Town homepage, provides an overview of the steps required for common permits, information about the departments that issue permits, and a quick checklist to help with your next project. Although you will still need to contact the office, this may help you gather the necessary information for your permits before you begin.



Information on Boards and Committees

Wondering who's on the boards and committees? Looking for minutes from past meetings? On the left sidebar of the Planning Department website you can find information such as meeting times, minutes, agendas, and a list of members and terms for the Design Review Board, Planning Board, Zoning Subcommittee, Zoning Board of Appeals, and other committees related to the Planning Department.

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WELCOME TO CONSERVATION AND DEVELOPMENT

“In a time of dwindling budgets, how do we provide better service to people that need it?” This is the question that underlies the recent transformation of the Planning, Conservation, and Inspections departments, according to Dave Ziomek, director of Conservation and Development. Completed in May 2009, the departments of Planning, Conservation, and Inspections—which were previously located in different areas of Town Hall—have been consolidated into the newly created Office of Conservation and Development. Community Development, which shares many aspects of work with Planning, was relocated to Town Hall from the Bangs Center. This move, completed over the course of a full year, involved the creation of entirely new workspace on the second floor of Town Hall with equipment purchased with cost-savings from improved efficiency, during a time when budgets were at a record low (including the loss of two staff positions).



Before the Move (photo: Nathaniel Malloy)

Part of a larger effort by the Town Manager to improve efficiency throughout Town Hall, this department consolidation represents a major shift both in physical services, but also in philosophy. Previously, the various departments had difficulty collaborating, despite their close physical proximity and shared areas of expertise—for a single building permit, one might need to work with Planning, Inspections, and Conservation separately. This plan brought together a number of departments having to do with permitting – “essentially one-stop shopping,” as Ziomek puts it.

Many visitors to Town Hall won’t see these changes, however, because they visit the website, which has also been improved in recent months. For example, the Conservation Department’s webpage includes a virtual tour of conservation areas, as well as a map showing locations of farm stands within Amherst. Other new, useful information the website includes the “Citizen’s Guide to Project Review and Permit Process,” which provides handy links to important documents and information to help landowners and others understand the permitting process. Now that the office consolidation is complete, Conservation and Development is working on providing even more opportunities for people to access valuable information through the web.



Office of Conservation and Development (photo: Evadne Friedman)

Behind the scenes, Conservation and Development has also migrated to a new integrated data management software, MUNIS. This software allows Town staff to enter permit and other information into a single, centralized platform, providing for greater coordination of information between departments. In the future, MUNIS may allow Conservation and Development to share permit information with other Town entities such as the Fire Department—a big difference in the workflow and efficiency of the department.

STAFF SPOTLIGHT: NATHANIEL MALLOY

The newest member of the Planning Department's staff, Nathaniel Malloy has worked as an Associate Planner for the past two years since graduating from the UMass LARP program with a master's degree in both planning and landscape architecture.

As a graduate student, Nate worked with the Center for Rural Massachusetts providing assistance to small communities in western Massachusetts, helping to maintain the balance between development and preservation in rural towns. Nate enjoys long-range projects and has a particular passion for "bridging conservation and planning" which has served him well in his work with Town committees, including the Puffers Pond 2020 Committee and the Historical Commission. He also enjoys working with the Disability Access Advisory Committee (DAAC) since it has helped him learn the value of an accessible community and universal design.

Most recently, Nate has been working towards the creation of Amherst's first Local Historic District, which he believes would be a great asset to the town: "I'm excited for the process, to see what happens—it's a big first step for Amherst." Since joining the Town staff, Nate's exceptional skills have helped the Town secure more than \$900,000 in grant funds, ranging from open space preservation to energy efficient updates to a street-tree inventory.

Originally from Greenfield, Nate has found a match in Amherst, a town he says appeals to him because with its village centers and abundant open space, "at its heart, it's still a small town." Nate lives in scenic Turners Falls with his wife Emily and 8 month old son. Nate and his family enjoy skiing, hiking, and other outdoor recreation, especially blowing bubbles with 'baby Jonathan.' Believe it or not, even though Nate provides computer support to the Office of Conservation & Development, he does not own a cell phone or a TV.



Enjoying a Summer Swing (photo: Emily Malloy)

PROJECT UPDATES

Kendrick Park – Senior Planner Christine Brestrup has spent much of 2010 working on the development of Kendrick Park. She helped guide the Kendrick Park Committee through development of a design and use program for the proposed new park, developed and sent out a Request for Proposals for design services for the new park, assisted a selection committee in reviewing consultant responses and selecting a consultant, and is currently setting up the public process for design of the new park.

Olympia Drive Housing – With the assistance of other Planning staff, CDBG Coordinator Roy Rosenblatt is arranging for a number of CDBG-funded contracts involved in the creation of a new affordable housing project at the east end of Olympia Drive. This project has been under development in one way or another since 1987, when the Town took the land by eminent domain, and is on schedule for completion around 2012.

Village Center Zoning – Rezoning Amherst's centers to allow for appropriate denser development is a central tenet of the Master Plan. Department staff are working with the Zoning Subcommittee on an RFP for a consultant to assist with planning and rezoning the North Amherst and Atkins Corner village centers. Staff are also working with the Amherst Redevelopment Authority, which is considering the development of an urban renewal plan and accompanying zoning for the proposed Gateway Corridor, and is looking at hiring its own consultant for that project. The Gateway Corridor project proposes to link the northern end of the downtown and the UMass campus with new mixed use development along North Pleasant Street, to include substantial new student housing.

The Central Corridor Project – Federal funding has been obtained for the Knowledge Corridor project, which will rebuild the north-south rails west of the Connecticut River between Springfield and Northfield, moving the Amtrak line from Amherst to a new stop in Northampton in 2-5 years. Planning Director Jonathan Tucker and Town Manager Larry Shaffer have spent much of the summer meeting with local and state officials to save Amherst's passenger rail access through promotion of a new Central Corridor rail project. The Central Corridor would provide rail stops at several communities including Amherst and improve the New England Central Railroad (NECR) line that links New London, CT with Brattleboro, VT and points north to Montreal, including a link from UMass/Amherst to UConn/Storrs and UVT/Burlington. At an east-west transfer hub at Palmer, MA, the Central Corridor would provide rail links to and from Boston for much of northern CT, west central MA, and southern VT.

"The strongest principle of growth lies in human choice." -George Eliot

MASTER PLAN (CONTINUED FROM PAGE 1)

which are detailed actions necessary to fulfill the objective. By following the goals, objectives, and strategies, you can see how the Master Plan is meant to work.

For example, if you wanted to know what the Master Plan proposed in terms of mixed-use development projects in Amherst, you would begin with the “key directions”—the broad visions identified in Chapter 2. These key directions are all founded on the concept of sustainable development, defined as “development that meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs.” (p. 2.3). After examining the key directions, you would then look in the appropriate chapters for goals, objectives, or strategies having to do with mixed-use projects.

- **Key Direction:** Encourage vitality in the downtown and village centers. Amherst’s downtown and village centers should be a focus for the community’s economic life, cultural vigor, and social activity.
- **Land Use Goal :** A sustainable, attractive town with a viable, mixed-use downtown and active village centers that are well connected with livable and diverse neighborhoods and campuses, and interwoven with protected open space, natural resources, and active farmland.
- **Objective:** Create vital downtown and village centers (areas of mixed-use, including retail, commercial, and residential elements) that are walkable, attractive and efficient. Through infrastructure investment, incentives, and improved regulations, the Town should foster increased economic, cultural and social activity in the downtown and outlying village centers by encouraging a variety of mixed-uses including live-work units. These areas should foster interactions through attractive public spaces and the creation of a walkable environment
- **Strategy:** Change zoning to allow denser residential occupancy near existing services and public transit. Residential development near or in combination with shops, services, and public transit can greatly contribute to a more vital community, particularly when streetscapes are designed to promote walking and biking. Such development can reduce energy consumption, help build a sense of community, and improve community health overall. Residents are more likely to interact on the street and enjoy public spaces when they can walk or bicycle to many of their daily destinations.



This example illustrates how community values and goals derived from the surveys, workshops, and public feedback received through the Planning Amherst Together Process have been translated into the specific strategies outlined in the Master Plan. There are also other relevant goals, objectives, and strategies associated with mixed use development in other chapters. (Hint: Try the chapters on Housing, Transportation, or Economic Development).

The Master Plan should be the first place anyone interested in the social, economic, or environmental aspects of Amherst’s community life should look to find out where the community intends to go. But the Master Plan is just a beginning, just a framework—the real work is in how the community will turn the plan into reality.

BOARD & STAFF NEWS

Sandra Anderson, a former Director of Campus Services at UMass, was appointed to the Board as a new member. Planning Board member **Denise Barberet’s** term ended on June 30. A vacant position remains to be filled.

Roy Rosenblatt, formerly our Director of Community Services, retired in July and continues on with reduced hours as CDBG Coordinator, as a consultant. His knowledge of the maze of CDBG programs is prodigious and it will take us a long time to download what’s in his brain. Until then, we can’t allow him to retire for real to his family, his dogs, his opera, and his shiraz.

Mark Parent, a local business owner, was recently appointed for a second term as an Alternate member of the Zoning Board of Appeals.

Evadne Friedman and **Rebekah DeCoursey**, both UMass graduate students in the LARP/Regional Planning Program graciously assisted the Planning Department as volunteer summer interns. Evadne prepared this newsletter and helped with the ongoing permit process guide. Rebekah utilized her skills to create additional 3-D models of existing buildings in North Amherst and Atkins Corner as a jump start to possible rezoning in those areas. We greatly appreciate – and thank them for volunteering with us.